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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SECOND
DECADE TO COMBAT RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Written statement submitted by Baha'i International
Community, a non-governmental organization in
consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication,
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[3 January 1992]

1. The Baha'i perspective on racism is based on the view that humankind is evolving towards a single social order whose boundaries will be no other than those of the planet. Prejudice, war and exploitation are the expressions of immature stages in a vast historical process leading to the inevitable unification of the human race. Thus, the recrudescence of racism in some countries in recent times represents a destructive and stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour and are part of the turbulence associated with the emergence of a world free from the scourge of racism and all forms of prejudice, marking humanity's coming of age. We believe that loyalty to humanity as a whole and consciousness of the oneness of humankind should be the guiding principle of the world community. The implications of this principle, therefore, should be explored in the three basic areas of human rights activity within the United Nations system namely education, standard-setting and monitoring. We offer the following observations and recommendations concerning each of these areas.

2. With respect to education about racism, it is important to emphasize that contemporary manifestations of racial discrimination are usually based on subconscious attitudes. In the Study on the achievements made and obstacles encountered during the Decades to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1989/8 and Add.1), the author observes that the contemporary problems of racism "are more clearly faced as social conflicts and as cultural and ethnic exclusion and rejection" although they have been shaped by "past pseudo-scientific theories and corresponding attitudes" (para. 438). Therefore, "ethnocentrism" and "racism", although they are distinct phenomena, often overlap. It is increasingly apparent that eradicating racism requires a more expansive consciousness of the oneness of the human race which, beyond the basic premise that we are one biological species, also incorporates social and spiritual criteria as a bulwark against "everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others".

3. In order to eradicate racism, an "anti-racist" position is not sufficient in itself. It should be reinforced by a vision of a more advanced and unified society in which diversity is a resource and not a burden. Such a constructive approach should increasingly emphasize the deleterious effects of racism not only on its victims, but also on its perpetrators. In the words of the preamble of the 1963 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 1904 (XVIII) of 20 November 1963, "racial discrimination harms not only those who are its objects but also those who practise it". Indeed, we believe that racism not only "retards the unfoldment of the boundless potentialities of its victims" but that it also corrupts its perpetrators by depriving them of the benefits of diversity. In this connection, focusing attention on the prevention of discrimination against the most vulnerable groups in society, such as indigenous tribes and peoples, should be a matter of high priority.

4. In the area of human rights education, we highly commend the continuation of the activities of UNESCO aimed at implementing the 1974 recommendation of the general conference concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms. In developing pedagogical material, it would be useful to explore ways in which parents can educate their children in their formative pre-school years when basic moral values are conceptualized. Guided throughout their early experience to understand and appreciate the principle of unity in diversity, the younger generation will adopt attitudes and behaviour which more fittingly express the nobility of the human race. Moreover, we would like to emphasize, as we have in the past, the importance of developing a universal yet culturally adaptable curriculum on the oneness of humankind, which will serve to neutralize racism's root causes as well as its particular manifestations. Such a curriculum should not only deal with moral values but also with the identification and development of human spiritual capacities. In other words, it is through a process of spiritual transformation at the individual and collective levels that moral values are incorporated into social life in a lasting and meaningful way.

5. In terms of standard-setting, various United Nations human rights instruments refer to aspects of the oneness of humankind. For example, the 1966 UNESCO Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation, proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization at its fourteenth session, on 4 November 1966, states that "in their rich variety and diversity, and in the reciprocal influences they exert on one another, all cultures form part of the common heritage belonging to all mankind" (art. 1 (3)). Beyond the basic dual principles of non-discrimination against and protection of minorities therefore, this Declaration adopts the principle of cultural interdependence and the notion that society benefits as a whole from the contributions of its diverse elements which constitute an inextricable part of the "common heritage" of humankind. It may be useful to reflect and expand further on a dynamic notion of the "common heritage" as a foundation for a "common destiny" or "common future" of humankind leading to the unification of the human race in one planetary social order. This particular expression of the principle of the oneness of humankind could significantly influence the philosophical and juridical interpretation of human rights as well as the formulation and development of policy by the United Nations, Governments and non-governmental organizations.

6. In order to develop a viable world system capable of monitoring and enforcing human rights standards, including those aimed at eliminating racial discrimination, we believe that more States should be encouraged to accede to the first Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and also article 14 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The right of petition by individuals to the Human Rights Committee as well as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination should also be supplemented by other concrete measures aimed at strengthening United Nations action in the field of human rights through the principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity. The decision of the Economic and Social Council (resolution 1991/32) to interpret rule 59 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Council so as to allow the members of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to "vote on resolutions pertaining to allegations of violations of human rights in countries by secret ballot", is a positive step in this direction.

7. The Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, which coincides with the Decade of International Law, provides an auspicious opportunity to develop further measures aimed at creating more independent and impartial human rights bodies as part of an expanding world system of human rights. In the context of confronting extreme forms of racism, particular emphasis should be placed on developing effective mechanisms for the enforcement of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Existing mechanisms are clearly inadequate and accordingly, we once again recommend the establishment of a Committee on Genocide to act as an impartial and universal guarantor of the rights contained in the Convention. We have previously elaborated upon the competence and structure of such a Committee and our recommendation is contained in the revised and updated Report on the question of the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide prepared by Mr. B. Whitaker (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/6; see para. 85).

8. The Baha'i International Community has aspired, from its very inception, to transform society by engaging individuals in a process of reflection and action, based on the principle of the oneness of humanity. In the midst of the afflictions plaguing society in the nineteenth century, and while in exile because of his teachings, Bahá'u'lláh appealed to the peoples of the world to eradicate prejudice from their midst. His son summarized this appeal in these words:

"O humankind! Verily, ye are all the leaves and fruits of one tree; ye are all one. Therefore, associate in friendship; love one another; abandon prejudice of race; dispel forever this gloomy darkness of human ignorance, for the century of light, the sun of reality hath appeared. Now is the time for affiliation, and now is the period of unity and concord. For thousands of years ye have been contending in warfare and strife. It is enough. Now is the time for unity. Lay aside all self-purposes, and know for a certainty that all men are the servants of one God who will bind them together in love and agreement." 1/

1/ Bahá'u'lláh, cited by Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 1982 edition, p. 322.
